

PCA UPDATE

UNREAD ELECTROCARDIOGRAMS

September, 2000

The Patient Care Assessment (PCA) Committee of the Massachusetts Board of Registration in Medicine has seen a number of major incidents involving undiagnosed cardiac disorders because of a delay in reading electrocardiograms (EKGs). In these incidents, the EKGs were not read or seen by the treating physicians until after the patient died. Reported cases include pre-operative EKGs indicative of ischemia not read until after the patient's post-operative death, emergency room EKGs not read until after the patient's discharge and death, and routine admission EKGs taken on a general floor but not read until after the patient's death.

These incidents are of two general types: (1) the abnormal EKG was in the medical record but no physician read it, or (2) the abnormal EKG was not in the record or reported to the responsible physician.

The PCA Committee is not prescribing how this problem should be prevented; that is the responsibility of each health care facility's medical staff. The purpose of this Update is simply to alert facilities that this problem is prevalent, and to recommend that you review your relevant procedures and revise them if necessary.

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